

Waldorf Essentials

A Journey through Waldorf Grade 2

SAMPLE



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Edited by Erik Nielsen*

A Journey Through Waldorf
Homeschooling
Grade Two



by Melissa & Erik Nielson

Remember that grade 2 is for the child that is 8 or nearly 8. If you need placement assistance please feel free to contact me. waldorfessentials@gmail.com

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A bit from Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Parent Care

“...we need to consider three human virtues – concerning, on the one hand, the child’s development, and on the other hand, what is seen in relation to society in general. They are three fundamental virtues. The first concerns everything that can live in the will to gratitude, the second, everything that can live in the will to love, and third, everything that can live in the will to duty. Fundamentally, these are the three principal human virtues and, to a certain extent, encompass all other virtues.”

~ Rudolf Steiner, “Gratitude, Love, and Duty”

The importance of inner work as you walk the Waldorf path. If you worked with us for your first grade year or you follow our work on this subject, then this chapter is no surprise to you! Inner work and self care for mothers and families is a great passion of mine, but it tends to shock people that are coming to Waldorf education from other methods. Steiner’s work often calls us to ponder... if we don’t we are doomed to be frustrated with it! Inner work is something beyond pondering. Many parents get through the early years of parenting and even through the first grade curriculum with no trouble... eking their way, learning little by little about Steiner’s view of the stages of development and hopefully learning how to connect to Deity. Yes... God. Source... Goddess... what ever you want to call that entity for yourself – for this is a personal relationship, one between you and the divine, no one else.

The suggestion of inner work gets me a lot of frustrated parents but it is often these same parents that are trying to maintain order and instill virtues within the home. Refusing to look at our spirit when we are working through a spiritual curriculum is a lot like ice skating uphill. Your children turn to you for guidance in all things. The Waldorf curriculum is a beautiful flow of cultural concepts that when studied can bring so much love and mercy to our own lives – humbling us and allowing us to live a life of tolerance, forgiveness and peace.

In 2009, we began a program called “Be a Beacon” with the intent on bringing mothers closer to owning and loving motherhood while cultivating a direct connection with the Divine. For some mothers this comes easily because it was cultivated in a healthy way for them as children; for others this is a struggle, someone, somewhere along the line used God to harm them. If you are one of these mothers, understand that you can heal that within yourself. Waldorf is a wonderful beginning as each turn begs you to understand your child the way God does. It is such a humbling journey.

If prayer and meditation make you nervous, start small. Ask yourself “how do I see my life?” This question seems superficial but can easily lend itself to deep pondering. If you have been living on borrowed faith since you started your mothering journey or before, then the concept of seeking guidance from Source will stretch you. Mothering forces us to take a good look at ourselves – our strengths and our weaknesses. Sometimes we want to just brush those weaknesses aside and not think about them... doing that assures that the Universe will give us a swift spanking at some point! I prefer to look at my life, take stock and be responsible for my failures for they are every bit as much a part of me as my victories. Every step I have taken has brought me to where I stand right now. There is strength in knowing that we can look at our weaknesses and learn to overcome them.

Think about the virtues you want your children to carry with them. I heard recently that financial poverty is not nearly as bad as moral poverty. This really made me think... moral poverty? It is the decay of standards, morals and virtues in our fast paced society. It has less to do with religion and more to do with our floundering... trying to do everything better than the generation before without looking at what we are losing in the process. Now this isn't a call to join a church if you aren't inclined, this is more of a call to understand the role of Deity as you parent this ever changing child. Trust me, they grow so fast and one day that eight-year-old will be 14 and begging for their box to get a little bigger... you will have to ask yourself... did I teach them? What do I want them to know? It is more than just schoolwork – it is beyond the basics of the Waldorf curriculum, it is at the core of loving and feeling and knowing that you took every opportunity to not just work on them, but also on yourself. It is knowing that you are an example to them.

Wow... I hope I haven't lost you! Remember this isn't about religion, this is about teaching morals and virtues that supersede religious impulses. Just how does this relate to Waldorf and why do you need to keep working on it? I think this quote, from the foreword of the book "Rhythms of Learning" says it best:

"The self-education of adults is essential for the Waldorf approach to educating children, because Waldorf does not consist solely of methods, techniques, or structures, but rather the development of human capacities – those of the children but also, and more importantly, those of the teachers and parents."

Our task is to understand them... body, mind and soul, we can't do that if we don't understand ourselves. Taking the time to not just understand the curriculum, but also to understand who you are – how you want to mother and how you want to bring forward your strengths will be the best asset you can have on this journey. My hope is that you will allow Waldorf education to not just nurture your children, but also to heal you. This method can bring things to the surface that you may not even know you carry inside. Our job is to work with that and heal it as best we can before we face our children.

I find some of Steiner's suggestions to be very helpful as I walk this path. He has many meditations that can work well with motherhood – especially while playing both roles – mother and teacher. One of my favorite exercises are ones that can be practiced each day of the week. These exercises can be started one per week to get grounded and then turned to a focus per day. There are eight exercises, one should be done along with the other for each day. Sounds confusing, so let me explain.

Let's begin with the one exercise you will do each, Steiner calls it "Right Meditation" – "From time to time, turn your gaze inward, even if for only five minutes at the same time each day. You should sink into yourself; take careful counsel with yourself; test and form your principles of life. In your mind, go through your insights – or the opposite. Weigh your duties. Consider the substance and the real goals of your life. Experience serious displeasure at your faults and imperfections. In other words, try to discover what is essential and permanent, and earnestly propose the appropriate goals – for instance, the virtues you should acquire." When my days aren't going right, this simple exercise can help bring me right back to perspective – it allows me to see how much I have accomplished and really gain wisdom into what my next move should be. It is a little like counting your blessings and taking stock of what is ahead. This should be a daily exercise, it is a great developer of the will.

Beginning daily exercises with Saturday, Steiner calls this “Right Thinking” – “Be aware of your thoughts. Think only meaningful thoughts. Gradually learn to separate in your thoughts the essential from the nonessential, the eternal from the transitory, and truth from mere opinion. When listening to conversation, try to become inwardly still, renouncing all agreement and, more important, all negative judgments (criticism and rejection). Do this in both thought and feeling.”

The next exercise would be for Sunday, Steiner calls this one “Right Judgment” – “Decide on even the most insignificant issues only after full, well-founded deliberation and reflection. All unthinking behavior and all meaningless actions should be discarded from the soul. Our reasons for everything we do should be fully deliberated. We should abstain from doing anything that has no significant reason. Once we are convinced that a decision is correct, we should adhere to it with inner steadfastness. This is “right judgment,” because it was made independently of attraction or aversion.” While this exercise seems like it could pull the fun out of everything, I learned to really use it to help me balance my impulses. When I stand back and look at everything, while it slows me down, I am always happy that I took the time to really explore it.

Monday’s exercise is something Steiner calls “Right Word” – “Only serious, meaningful speech must leave the lips of those who strive for higher development. All talk for the sake of talking – to pass the time, for example – is harmful. Avoid the usual sort of conversation that involves jumbled, simultaneous crosstalk. This does not mean that you should cut yourself off from interacting with others. Especially in such interaction, your speech should gradually become increasingly meaningful. Listen thoughtfully to every statement and answer. Consider every approach. Never speak without a reason. Prefer silence. Try not to talk too much or too little. Listen quietly and process what you hear.” This one is tough! We are mothers, we have to speak right? Of course! We are called though, more than others I think to really think about our words. It is so easy to just talk and not really say anything – our children do it often! There is something to be said for modeling this for them. Start with short intervals, an hour or even 30 minutes if an hour is a stretch. Focus on *doing* rather than *talking about doing*. They follow our lead so well when we just set forth and DO.

On Tuesday, the exercise turns to “Right Deed” – “Our outer actions should not disturb others. When you are moved inwardly (by conscience) to act, carefully weigh how best to employ the occasion for the good of the whole, and the happiness of others and the eternal. When you act from yourself and your own initiative, weigh the consequences of your actions in the most fundamental way.” This is one of my favorites, probably because it is often not present in our modern society. Often we are faced with people or situations when we want to say “what were you thinking?!” Well this one really helps me to not be part of the problem. This is a great one to model for your children at this age, while they are out of the age of imitation, they are very much into a place of feeling, they will be watching you more and more as they approach age nine and really try to discern whether or not you are who you say you are.

Wednesday’s exercise, Steiner calls “Right Standpoint” – “In ordering your life, live in harmony with nature and spirit. Do not get buried in the external knickknacks of life. Avoid all that brings restlessness and haste to your life. Be neither impetuous nor lazy. Consider life as a means of inner work and development and act accordingly.” WOW... have you thought about your life as an act of inner work? It took me several years to really understand how this can work while being a mother. It almost sounds as though Steiner expects us to become monks. Maybe... mothering monks? When we can order our lives to be so we can truly understand our role with our children and our partner and how that translates to us... how we can really obtain peace AND happiness. It takes time, practice and

realizing that we are more than this place... we are more than those knickknacks that we hold so tight to.

Steiner describes Thursday as “Right Striving” – “In human striving, take care not to do anything beyond your power. At the same time, however, do not leave anything undone that is within your ability. Look beyond the moment, the ordinary, and pose goals (ideals) for yourself that are connected with the highest of human responsibilities. In relation to these exercises, for example, try to develop yourself so that later – if not immediately – you may be better able to help and advise others.” This one speaks so deeply to me as a wife and mother. Each day is about having the right mix of doing and letting go. Our school planning needs this mix as well. This year, you will be watching your child transform as they begin to understand striving a bit more... striving to better their reading (or learn to read), striving to understand their math, to learn about the inner core of wonderful people. Second grade is a perfect year to see striving in both you as the beacon for your family and in your child as they begin toward the next phase in development.

Friday’s exercise is great, it reminds us to recall what we have learned from our experiences. Steiner called Friday’s exercise “Right Memory” – “Strive to learn as much as possible from life. Nothing happens that does not give us the opportunity to gather experiences that are useful for life. If you have done something incorrectly or incompletely, it becomes an opportunity to do it correctly or completely later on. When you see others act, observe them with the same end in mind (but not without love). Do nothing without looking at past experiences that may help in your decisions and actions. If you are attentive, you can learn much from everyone, including small children.” I have learned so much from my children, they teach me far more than I teach them. I am forever thankful.

With time, these exercises can become a part of your life and you won’t have to think twice about them. They shouldn’t take up too much time in your day. I like to ponder them as I get up in the morning and then allow my mind to drift back to them as the day goes on. It is helpful to have a notebook handy when you are working through them, it allows you to write down observations about each experience.

Finding comfort in fables and saints. This year will have you looking at morality and virtue within the curriculum far more than in first grade, not just with the introduction of saintly people but also in the fables that are part of this year. You don’t have to be Catholic to gain wisdom from the characters of study this year. There are many saintly stories, from traditional Catholic saints to Hindu saints and many others. This is a perfect year to connect with the saints through the festivals. I don’t suggest you pray to the saints, as I know many are uncomfortable with it, but there is something deeply moving about pondering and meditating on their lives and struggles. As a Waldorf parent, I find it so enriching to lose myself in the material I am going to be teaching. Some of my favorite reading moments have been from books that I have chosen to further my understanding of the topic. Historical movies are great for this too, especially as your children grow through the history portion of the curriculum.

I love the way Manette Teitelbaum describes the second grader in the book “Waldorf Education: A Family Guide” – she says: “...the second grade child still delights in the mystery of a spiritual world where he still dwells at heart. He sits in rapt attention to legends of those spiritual being who have the forces of nature in their service.” Knowing this, allows me to also keep this in mind myself. Falling in love with the qualities of these people. Not their service to their church, but their service to humanity. When we can be lost in this concept it helps us bring virtue to our children’s lives in such a meaningful way.

I recently began reading “Saint Francis” by Nikos Kazantzakis, it is so warming to read the pages as they transform me to a place of meditation. “My heart is being watered. It cracks open, sends forth a shoot – and you, Father Francis, appear. All the soil inside me has blossomed, Father Francis.”

I encourage you to take the time to read deeply about the topics you will be teaching, find ways to allow them to penetrate you. When you feast yourself on the material then you can also give them the feast they need, rather than left overs and table scraps! Now don’t panic... you can do it. We’ll talk more in later chapters about just how to go about your planning so you can enjoy the curriculum as much as you want your children to. For now, just ponder the idea of falling in love with the material and using it as a tool for spiritual growth. Delight in the stories of holy people and in the comedy of the fables.

One objection I often get with the saints block in this grade is that families of non-Christian background don’t want to expose their children to this concept. I also get the same objection, believe it or not from very conservative non-Catholic families. It is important to look at Waldorf as a whole rather than breaking it down. As a whole, Waldorf education is multi-faith. I delight in knowing that my children can take comfort in being of this world but not worldly. While the second grade curriculum might seem overly Catholic or Christian in origin, third grade could be considered Jewish (Old Testament stories), while fourth grade might be seen as old world Pagan (Norse Myth), fifth grade can be characterized as Pagan and Hindu with the introduction of Egypt, India and Greece, while sixth grade takes us back to Christianity with the life of Christ and then over to Islam with the life of Mohammed. In the end, if we allow the curriculum to work, our children will have a beautiful understanding of some of the major world cultures.

It is important to remember that these lessons are not a replacement for religious education in the home and just because the Old Testament isn’t studied in depth until third grade, this doesn’t mean a Christian or Jewish family should shy away from it. Steiner reminds us that children need religious upbringing – note he doesn’t say they need a particular religion, just religious upbringing. To many this raises a giant red flag but really it just goes back to the thoughts I laid forth before about reverence and virtue. Virtues are from the Divine, these are what we are seeking to cultivate – love, honor, humility, etc. teaching these at home will often do more than a month of Sundays with our bottom in a pew. Keeping in mind that we are their best first teacher, allows us to cultivate these virtues at home, within ourselves first and then with them. Talk about them with your partner, get on the same page about how you feel in regards to their religious upbringing. Work together to grow this within your home.

This quote by Steiner says it best:

“No hands can bless in old age, unless in childhood they have been folded in prayer.”

A bit from Chapter 6
Chapter Six
Grade Two Overview

Who is ready for second grade? I am often asked this question especially in how it pertains to first grade, but almost as often for second grade. If you are newer to Waldorf education then the idea of teaching to the age and not using the standard grades system we grew up with can be a bit mind boggling. Steiner believed that there was a certain set of lessons for each grade and unlike traditional school, it isn't a race to see who is the smartest, fastest or tests well. Waldorf is really set up to enhance your child as he develops. The fairy tale material that was perfect for the first grader, has now turned to stories of fables and saints. How do you know if your child is ready? If your child is going on eight years old or has just turned eight then this is the correct year for him or her.

Coming to Waldorf late, what should I know? If you are new to the method, it is tempting to go back and try to experience all that your child missed in kindergarten and first grade, I don't blame you! These are magical years and it can be frustrating to have not found the method sooner. You can certainly work to put those fun elements into your year... if this is your oldest child and there are some to follow, then you can enjoy those parts as your younger children move through the curriculum. If this is your only or your youngest child, then go over the elements you are craving, perhaps it is all the baking and singing? Or maybe it is just the story content from those early years? The stories could easily be used as extra stories before bed or during an afternoon rest time. There are so many options, don't feel like you are missing anything, just work to incorporate it into your plan. Remember that you are in charge!

Sometimes parents worry about the academic portions of grade one that they might have missed. These might include mathematics and form drawing. If your child is already reading then you can continue to build those skills. If you are concerned with writing and grammar, don't be, writing is introduced slowly in first grade and built upon each year. Some grammar will be introduced this year, but the bulk of it begins in third grade. I would consider form drawing from grade one as it is an important part of the curriculum and worth understanding and reviewing the forms from grade one that you may have missed. Also review the way the Waldorf curriculum introduces mathematics. There is no need to purchase a full grade one curriculum to catch up, our *Coming to Waldorf Late* guides cover these topics for you.

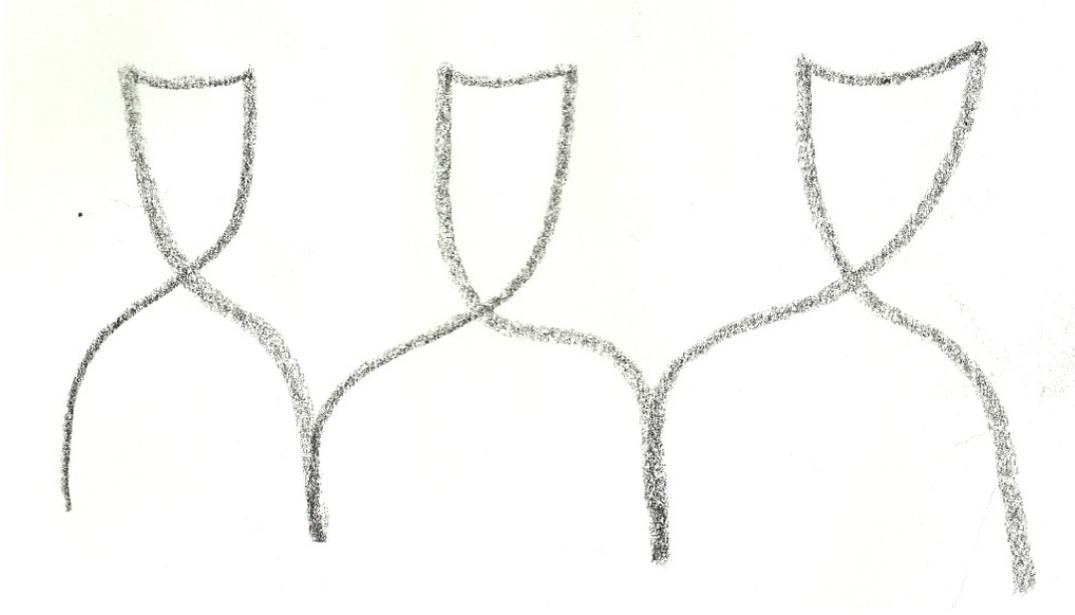
A portion from A Year at a Glance

<p>September Saint stories, form drawing</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 4 weeks legends of saints</p>	<p>October Fables, form drawing</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 4 weeks fables</p>	<p>November Animal stories, saints, form drawing, holiday break</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 2 weeks Burgess animal stories</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 1 week St. Martin</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 1 week holiday break</p>
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A portion from the weekly/daily guide

<p>November</p>	
<p>Week 1 – In preparation this week, practice the form drawing, read the tales and practice your paints, drawing or sculpting.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Lesson 33 – Form drawing. Buster Bear</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Lesson 34 – Recall and summarize.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Lesson 35 – Little Joe</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Lesson 36 – Recall and summarize</p>	<p>Week 2 – Saint Martin. In preparation for this week, read the story and be sure to have all supplies on hand for your festival. Practice your form drawing and your lesson pictures.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Lesson 37 – Form drawing. St. Martin story.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Lesson 38 – Recall and summarize.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Lesson 39 – Make lanterns</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Lesson 40 – Martinmas feast</p>
<p>Week 3 – Thanksgiving- if you are not American or do not celebrate this one, then just shift your weeks up or take the week and focus on gratitude.</p>	<p>Week 4 – – In preparation this week, practice the form drawing, read the tales and practice your paints, drawing or sculpting.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Lesson 41 – Form drawing. More Buster Bear.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Lesson 42 – Recall and summarize.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Lesson 43 – More Little Joe.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Lesson 44 – Recall and summarize.</p>

Lesson 5 – This is a great story and it lends itself to a couple of activities, you could certainly paint or draw the lion, but what about using modeling beeswax or clay to shape him?



Saint Jerome by Melisa Nielsen

Long ago lived a man named Jerome, he was a kind man and people say that children and angels were always around him, listening. Jerome was a very smart man and people came from hundreds of miles away to visit him, he was a doctor, a philosopher and a historian. Jerome was also a priest, he roamed the hills near his village to observe plants and be with the animals. Jerome was a lot like Francis, he could talk to the animals and they didn't fear him.

One day, while walking, Jerome came upon a monastery. "Curious," he thought as he walked through the gates. "the gates are open but this place seems abandoned. Where could all the monks be?" Jerome searched and before long he heard whispers.

"Father Jerome, is that you? Take care, a lion roams the grounds!"

Jerome walked toward the sound of the whispering. "How did a lion get into your keep?" asked Jerome.

"We usually take great care to lock the gate each evening but three days ago we were tending to an ill monk and we forgot to lock the gate. The lion appeared in the night," explained the frightened monk. "He is terribly angry and very fierce."

Jerome took leave of the monks and went to the chapel to pray. "God give me the strength to find a peaceful answer for the lion and by dear brothers, the monks."

Jerome left the chapel in search of the lion, while he searched, he whispered the words "God give me strength." Jerome finally spotted the lion, he was angry, but Jerome noticed he was limping. Looking closer, he saw a large thorn in the lion's paw.

“I am Jerome,” he began, “I am a healer and I love to help beasts in need. Will you allow me to look at your paw?”

The lion seemed to understand him and bowed before him, raising his paw. With the greatest of care, Jerome pulled the thorn from the lion’s paw. While the lion yelped, he seemed grateful to have the thorn removed. He nuzzled Jerome while Jerome patted his mane. Jerome realized that the lion wasn’t there to hurt anyone, he just wanted someone to help him with his paw. He assembled the monks and introduced them to the lion.

“This lion is now my friend, he wishes to remain here at the monastery to protect you from invaders.”

The monks all circled around the lion, groomed him and brought him some food. The lion lived at the monastery for many years protecting the monks and helping them in their daily tasks.

